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S E C R E T SECTION 01 OF 03 PARIS 000030

C O R R E C T E D C O P Y FOR ADDITION OF NOFORN (NF) CAPTION

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TAGS: [PTER](#) [PREL](#) [EAID](#) [PGOV](#) [PINR](#) [MOPS](#) [MA](#) [NG](#) [MR](#) [NI](#)  
AG, CH, SG, FR  
SUBJECT: AFRICOM COMMANDER'S DISCUSSIONS WITH FRENCH  
OFFICIALS ON AQIM AND OTHER AFRICA SECURITY THREATS

REF: A. 09 PARIS 1339  
[1](#)B. NIAMEY 11

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Classified By: Andrew Young, Political Counselor, reason 1.4 (b and d).

[1](#)1. (S/NF) SUMMARY: President Sarkozy's Diplomatic Advisor Jean-David Levitte, Sarkozy's Military Advisor, Admiral Edouard Guillaud, and others briefed U.S. AFRICOM Commander General William E. Ward on January 5 on security issues in Africa's Sahel region. The French pressed for additional coordination (military assistance, intelligence sharing, and development projects) in helping countries confront al-Qa'ida in the Islamic Maghreb (AQIM). In France's view, Mauritania could be the "spearhead" against AQIM, Niger positively "surprised" with its recent military engagement, but Mali remains "confrontation-averse." Other topics covered included France's African military bases, concerns about Senegal, the risk of a backlash against China, and hostage-taking trends. END SUMMARY.

[1](#)2. (C) U.S. AFRICOM Commander General William E. Ward was invited to Paris for consultations January 5-6. He discussed the al-Qa'ida in the Islamic Maghreb (AQIM) threat in Africa's Sahel region with President Sarkozy's Diplomatic Advisor (NSC Jones equivalent) Jean-David Levitte, Sarkozy's Military Advisor, Admiral Edouard Guillaud, Guillaud's Deputy, COL Eric Bucquet, and Elysee Africa Advisor Remi Marechaux. Later in that meeting, and at a subsequent dinner hosted by Guillaud (Levitte did not attend) the group continued to discuss a broad range of African security issues. General Ward was joined by SOCAF's BG Haas and Polad Dr. Brown, DAO staff, and Embassy Paris Africa Watcher. On January 6, General Ward participated in media events and later held meetings with French intelligence and security officials (reported separate channels).

THE AQIM THREAT -- WE NEED CLOSER COOPERATION

[1](#)3. (S) During the initial meeting, Guillaud, Levitte, and Marechaux provided France's assessment of AQIM's current activities and capabilities (focusing on Mali, Mauritania, and Niger), which was strikingly similar to the French

assessment provided to AF A/S Carson and other USG officials on September 10, 2009 during the U.S.-France Sahel Security conference in Paris (Ref A). Notably, France views AQIM as a limited, but active and dangerous threat composing approximately 150 dedicated fighters. The group's intel and logistics capacity remains potent, as evidenced by recent kidnapping of western hostages, which were quickly moved to AQIM comfort zones in Northern Mali ("crossing two thousand kilometers of desert in a couple of days8).

¶4. (S/NF) Guillaud asserted that AQIM represents France's greatest security concern, and it is vital that the group gains neither legitimacy nor broader operational space. Chad, Northern Nigeria, Burkina Faso, Senegal, Libya, and even Tunisia are at risk of AQIM influence if Mali, in particular, does not contain it -- with U.S. and French assistance. He assessed Mauritania as the most effective of the three countries in confronting AQIM and should be viewed as the "spearhead." At the same time, Guillaud was "happily surprised" by the aggressive tactics used recently by Niger's army, successful fight with AQIM elements in Niger. (Note: Marechaux later shared with AF-Watcher a classified report clarifying that Guillaud was referring to the late December incident also reported in Ref B. End note.) Noting current USG policy restrictions vis-a-vis Niger, Guillaud recommended the U.S. soften its stance on military cooperation since in the mid- to long-term it would be counterproductive for security reasons especially as Niger is inclined to fight AQIM. In his view, Mali's President Toure remains "confrontation-averse."

¶5. (S/NF) Guillaud and Levitte expressed appreciation for the improving coordination between the U.S. and France in supporting host country CT efforts, but noted that there remained room for improvement. They stated that President Sarkozy has personally requested French agencies to reach out to U.S. counterparts. France wants better coordination --

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not competition -- with the U.S. in a cohesive manner that includes discussions of military cooperation, enhanced intelligence sharing, and complimentary development assistance. Uniquely in the Sahel region, Guillaud claimed that he and his staff coordinated all three activities on behalf of the GOF. Even projects funded by France's development agency (AFD) in the region are approved by Guillaud's office. Levitte added that a more open U.S.-France approach is necessary to discourage host countries from attempting to "play us off each other." He emphasized that U.S.-French cooperation should be discreet and that there is no need to tell the other countries in the region our level of cooperation )- we should stay below the radar. (Note: Guillaud is expected to depart his current post in approximately one month to become France's new Chief of the Joint Staff. End note.)

¶6. (S/NF) At the same time, there was broad agreement that our efforts against AQIM must be centered on adding capacity to the host countries' ability (and political will) for confronting and defeating AQIM. General Ward added that France and the U.S. should maintain a low profile and not create the impression of a western presence that could turn the region into a new jihadist call to arms.

¶7. (S/NF) There was agreement that confronting the AQIM threat must also have Algeria's participation, but that requires a different approach than is envisioned for the three sub-Saharan countries.

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